

**Elementary School Counselors' Motivation to Support Student  
Academic Achievement Through Identified Standards**

Jennifer S. Barna

Marywood University

Pamelia E. Brott

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

### **Abstract**

The researchers explored the relationship between elementary school counselors' motivational orientation, perceptions of importance and levels of implementation of Academic and Personal/Social Standards as a strategy for supporting academic achievement. Responses from 212 elementary school counselors confirm both types of Standards as being highly important for and highly implemented in their programs. Utilizing Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) as a theoretical framework, it was found participants' motivation could best be characterized as *identified regulation* for incorporating personal and social development as a strategy to support academic achievement.

*Keywords:* school counselors, school counseling program, academic achievement, personal/social development, situational motivation

## **Elementary School Counselors' Motivation to Support Student Academic Achievement Through Identified Standards**

Educational reform to close the achievement gap introduced with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) is challenging school counselors to rethink how their programs are organized, delivered, and managed. Closing the achievement gap through increased accountability includes school counseling programs. In 2003, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) introduced *The ASCA National Model* to provide a comprehensive framework for school counseling programs. However, there continues to be uncertainty surrounding the role (e.g., educator, counselor) and how school counseling programs support academic achievement (Lieberman, 2004; Zalaquett, 2005). Linking specific school counseling program services to student academic achievement is difficult for a number of reasons including limited outcome research, programs comprising more than just academic interventions, and the underrepresentation of school counselors in important conversations regarding education reform. Significant pressure from "high stakes testing" has created an emphasis on interventions to improve students' academic competence (e.g., test scores, grades, graduation rates) resulting in a devaluing of programs and services that strengthen other areas, such as personal and social development.

However, test scores, grades, and graduation rates may not predict how emotionally well adjusted or successful students will become in future life endeavors. School counselors are among those professionals who believe that students must not only demonstrate academic achievement but also possess motivation, purposefulness, intentionality, and self-efficacy (Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007). Furthermore, a growing body

of research reinforces a positive link between students' academic achievement and their personal and social development in such areas as emotional intelligence, social competence, academic enablers, and attending behaviors (e.g., DiPerna, Volpe, & Elliot, 2001; Fleming et al., 2005; Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004).

Individuals with trait emotional intelligence have the behavioral dispositions to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information. Emotional intelligence acts as a moderator between cognitive ability and academic performance as assessed by IQ and grades (Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004). When identified as interpersonal skills, adaptability, and stress management, the presence of emotional intelligence has a positive impact on the academic achievement of high school students as measured by overall grade point average (Parker et al., 2004).

Academic achievement (i.e., standardized tests, course grades) has been associated with students' ability to regulate their attention, commitment to school, and social and problem solving skills (Fleming et al., 2005). Researchers have found that elementary and middle school students who participated in a structured group counseling program led by a school counselor aimed at improving academic, school, and social competence (e.g., social skills, self management) improved their math scores on a state standardized test (Webb et al., 2005).

The importance of personal and social development on student academic achievement has been explored as academic enablers. Defined as "attitudes and behaviors that allow a student to participate in, and ultimately benefit from, academic instruction in the classroom" (DiPerna & Elliot, 2002, p. 294), academic enablers are categorized as interpersonal skills, motivation, study skills, and engagement. A study by

DiPerna, Volpe, and Elliot (2001) connected classroom instruction, academic enablers, and academic skills to elementary students' language arts grades. The researchers found that prior achievement and interpersonal skills had a direct influence on motivation, which in turn effected achievement as evidenced by improved language arts grades.

From a contrasting perspective, research has linked problem behaviors such as aggression (Williams & McGee, 1994), anxiety (Stevens & Pihl, 1987), and hyperactivity (Saudino & Plomin, 2007) with decreases in academic achievement. In one example, researchers who examined the relationship between multiple problem behaviors and overall reading, spelling, and math performance in adolescents found that inattention was a mediating variable for achievement in these areas (Barriga, Doran, Newell, Morrison, Barbetti, & Robbins, 2002).

These studies highlight the importance of recognizing the unique contributions of personal and social development to academic achievement. The benefits of including personal and social development as part of a comprehensive school counseling program are twofold: (a) improving academic achievement and (b) supporting the development of emotionally healthy, socially competent, and goal-driven young people (ASCA, 2005; Webb et al., 2005). As student advocates, school counselors believe that test scores, grades, and graduation rates alone do not predict how happy, adjusted, or successful students will become. However, it is not always easy to persevere when the pressures of educational reform measure academic achievement as test scores. Understanding how school counselors view the importance and implementation of

school counseling standards related to students' personal and social development may shed light on how school counselors self-regulate and remain motivated.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is an empirical framework for understanding human motivation that highlights the importance of using inner resources for personality development and behavior self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). SDT distinguishes between two types of motivated behaviors (i.e., intrinsic, extrinsic) as well as a type of amotivated behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). *Intrinsic motivation* is present for any behavior chosen for its inherent interest and for which the reward is spontaneous satisfaction for the activity itself. *Extrinsic motivation* exists when behavior is connected to a separate outcome, such as a reward or deadline, and presents as a continuum that ranges from least to most self-determined (i.e., external regulation, introjection, identification, integration). *Amotivation* represents the absence of motivation and is characterized by a lack of intentionality, energy, and persistence.

Exploring the perceptions of school counselors who value and promote personal and social development as an important foundation element to student academic achievement will add to key educational conversations. Linking the importance and implementation of personal and social interventions to academic achievement will emphasize the need to include these interventions as part of the school counseling program. Because of the emphasis in elementary school to social and academic adjustments, a good starting point to explore these perceptions would be with elementary school counselors. Therefore, the authors undertook a study to explore the relationship between elementary school counselors' motivational orientation and their

perceptions and implementation of personal and social development as a strategy for supporting student academic achievement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

It is reasonable to expect that elementary school counselors who identify with higher levels of self-determined behaviors (i.e., motivation; Deci & Ryan, 1985) may be more intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) to pursue such a program focus as a means to support academic achievement. Further, it needs to be recognized that, across the United States, there are varying levels of implementation for the *ASCA National Model*. In some cases, states have either adopted the *ASCA National Model* or developed a state model. In one mid-Atlantic state, the State Board of Education authorized a team to write state standards, which were adopted in 2004. The state's *Standards for School Counseling Programs* are organized by grade groupings (K-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-12) and are reflective of developmental domains (academic, career, personal/social). Given this level of commitment to school counseling, the school counselors in this state provide a unique situational perspective to understand the motivation and perceived importance and implementation of personal/social development to support student academic achievement.

The focus of the study was to investigate elementary school counselors' perceptions of using personal and social development as a strategy to support student academic achievement and to explore if there is a link to one's motivational orientation. State standards for school counseling programs were used to articulate the knowledge and skills students acquire in academic development and personal and social development. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000b) was

used as the guiding framework for understanding the continuum of motivation. It was hypothesized that elementary school counselors who possessed *intrinsic motivation* for incorporating personal and social development interventions into their programs would report higher levels of implementation than school counselors who identified with *amotivation*. Questions guiding the study included the following:

1. To what extent do elementary school counselors perceive academic development to be more important than personal/social development as a strategy for supporting student academic achievement?
2. To what extent do elementary school counselors implement personal/social development differently from academic development as a strategy for supporting student academic achievement?
3. What proportion of the variance in the perceived importance and level of implementation for personal/social development is explainable by situational motivation dimensions?
4. How does the variance explained by situational motivation differ between personal/social development and academic development?

### **Method**

Based on 542 potential participants, 212 elementary school counselors completed the questionnaire (39% response rate). Respondents were 95% female, 84% white, and ranged in age from 24 to 64 ( $M = 43$ ,  $SD = 11.7$ ) with the majority (63%) of participants being less than 50 years old. The average number of years employed as a school counselor was 10 years; almost all of the participants (95%) were employed full time, and the average caseload was 467 students. Most of the participants (79%) were employed by schools that achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the most recent

school year. Using self report, 60% indicated that their school divisions have adopted the *ASCA National Standards* (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), 21% had not, and 19% did not know; 79% have adopted the state standards, and 82% have adopted school division standards for school counseling. Implementation of *The ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2005) was reported as 33% high, 46% medium, 15% low, and 6% unfamiliar.

## **Instruments**

### ***Standards for academic development and personal/social development.***

The 26 items (14 academic, 12 personal/social) were obtained directly from the *Virginia Standards for School Counseling Programs* (VDOE, 2004). These Standards were chosen because they are adapted from *The ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2005), are consistent with the State Board of Education regulations, adopted by the state school board, and serve as a foundation for the implementation of elementary school counseling programs. The academic development items relate to the academic preparation essential for students to choose from a variety of educational, training, and employment options upon the completion of high school. The personal and social development items reflect the goals to help students acquire an understanding of, and respect for, themselves and others and to assist them in becoming responsible members of the community. In addition, participants were asked to indicate the one item that was personally judged to be the most important for supporting academic achievement.

Participants were asked to indicate for each of the 26 items (a) how important (*importance*) each item is for supporting academic achievement of elementary students and (b) extent of implementation (*implementation*) into the school counseling program.

Ratings ranged from 0 = *not important* to 3 = *critical*. Regarding perceptions of importance, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for Academic Standard and for Personal/Social Standard subscales were very good (.88 and .87, respectively), and internal consistency values were very good (.89 and .83, respectively). Evidence of criterion-related validity was based on the items being taken directly from state approved standards.

***Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS)***. Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b), this scale was the first of its kind to represent motivation as a multidimensional construct (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000). The SIMS (2000) is a 16-item self-report inventory designed to measure four types of situational motivation that individuals experience when they are currently engaged in a specific activity (Vallerand, 1997). The four subscales include (a) *intrinsic motivation* as the experience of performing an activity for itself for the purposes of interest and enjoyment; (b) *identified regulation* when choosing a behavior because it is personally valued and perceived by the individual as self selected; (c) *external regulation* refers to behaviors regulated through extrinsic means such as obtaining a reward or to decreasing negative consequences; (d) *amotivation* when behaviors are perceived by the individual as having no sense of purpose, no expectation of a reward , and no possibility of changing. The SIMS has been found to be a consistently reliable, valid measure of situational motivation (Guay et al., 2000; Standage, Treasure, Duda, & Prusak, 2003). Reliability of the four subscales ranges from .93 to .95 (*intrinsic motivation*), .80 to .85 (*identified regulation*), .62 to .86 (*external regulation*), and .77 to .83 (*amotivation*) (Guay et al., 2000). A congruency coefficient of .71 provides evidence

of construct validity. Studies have demonstrated that the subscales are able to detect intra-individual changes in motivation (Standage et al., 2003). Although a relatively new instrument, the SIMS has been used to study the effects of choice and goal orientations in physical activity (Prusak, Treasure, Darst, & Pangrazi, 2004) and in educational contexts (Guay et al., 2000). It has also been used to test whether or not situational motivation can vary from one task to the next when activated by different cues (Ratelle, Baldwin, & Vallerand, 2004).

In the current study for each of the 16 items on the SIMS, participants were asked to "think about why interventions addressing personal/social development are a part of your school counseling program." They were instructed to use the scale (*1 = corresponds not at all to 7 = corresponds exactly*) and "check one number that best corresponds to why you choose to incorporate personal/social development interventions into your school counseling program as a strategy for supporting academic achievement."

### **Procedure**

IRB approval was obtained to conduct the study with human subjects. A total of 130 identified school counseling supervisors in the selected mid-Atlantic state were contacted with a request for elementary school counselors to participate in the study. Of those, 41 supervisors indicated they would forward a recruitment email containing a link to the online questionnaire to all elementary school counselors in their respective districts. Two follow-up emails were sent encouraging participation. Supervisors were asked to reply with the number of elementary school counselors receiving the recruitment email; at least 542 elementary school counselors received the request to

participate in the study with 211 completing the online version of the questionnaire and one completing the paper and pencil version.

The online version of the questionnaire was administered using Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), a secure web site for instrument creation and data collection. Data collected were transferred to an Excel® spreadsheet and stored on a secure computer. Data analysis was performed using JMP 7 for Windows (SAS Institute, 2007). Subscale scores were computed as average responses on *importance* and *implementation* for each of the two types of Standards (Academic, Personal/Social) and for the four types of situational motivation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for each of the eight subscale scores (i.e., Academic Importance, Academic Implementation, Personal/Social Importance, Personal/Social Implementation, *intrinsic motivation*, *identified regulation*, *external regulation*, *amotivation*).

Descriptive statistics and *t*-tests were computed. A correlational matrix was used to explore the relationships among the four situational motivation subscales and the subscales for perceived *importance* and *implementation* of both Standards. Four simple multiple regressions were used to determine the proportion of variance explained by situational motivation.

## Results

Internal reliability measures were computed for the *perceived importance* and *level of implementation* of the two types of Standards (Academic, Personal/Social) and the SIMS subscales (see Table 1). Cronbach's alphas were very good for both *perceived importance* (.88 Academic Standard, .87 Personal/Social Standard) and *level of implementation* (.89 Academic Standard, .82 Personal/Social Standard). Satisfactory

Cronbach's alphas were obtained for the SIMS subscales: .89 (*amotivation*), .87 (*intrinsic motivation*), .84 (*external regulation*), and .52 (*identified regulation*).

**Table 1**

*Correlation Matrix: Importance, Implementation, and Motivation Subscales*

Subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Importance											
1. Academic	3.53	0.36	(.88)								
2. Personal/Social	3.51	0.38	<b>0.74</b>	(.87)							
Implementation											
3. Academic	3.25	0.45	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.46</b>	(.89)						
4. Personal/Social	3.33	0.40	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.76</b>	(.82)					
Motivation											
5. <i>Intrinsic Motivation</i>	3.19	1.67	0.04	0.14	-0.03	0.01	(.87)				
6. <i>Identified Regulation</i>	4.32	1.08	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.27</b>	0.13	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.63</b>	(.52)			
7. <i>External Regulation</i>	2.11	1.34	-0.03	-0.00 <sup>a</sup>	0.02	-0.01	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.25</b>	(.84)		
8. <i>Amotivation</i>	1.20	0.60	-0.05	-0.06	-0.00 <sup>b</sup>	-0.05	0.06	-0.01	<b>0.36</b>	(.89)	
9. <i>Modified Identified Regulation</i>	5.80	1.30	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.27</b>	0.11	0.11	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.79</b>	0.14	-0.09	(.50)

Note: Correlations < |.16| are not statistically significant at .05. Values in the diagonal are reported Cronbach's alpha reliabilities.

<sup>a</sup> -0.009

<sup>b</sup> -0.006

### Perceived Importance of Standards for Supporting Academic Achievement

Participants indicated that all 26 items were considered important in supporting student academic achievement. Participant ratings of 0 to 3 were re-coded to a 1 to 4 scale with higher scores representing greater perceptions of importance. Rating means ranged from 3.20 to 3.82 for academic items and 3.24 to 3.92 for personal/social items. The mean for Academic Standard (14 items) was 3.54 (*SD* = 0.37) and the mean for Personal/Social Standard (12 items) was 3.55 (*SD* = 0.39). A *t*-test revealed no statistically significant difference for perceived importance between Academic Standard and Personal/Social Standard ( $p = .92$ ). A Pearson product moment correlation

indicated a moderately strong relationship ( $r = .74$ ) for perceived importance between the Academic Standard and Personal/Social Standard.

The three most important items for supporting student academic achievement based on means were (a) *exhibit the principles of character* (personal/social;  $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ); (b) *understand the expectations of the educational environment* (academic;  $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ); and (c) *understand the importance of individual effort, hard work, and persistence* (academic;  $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). The personal/social item to *exhibit the principles of character* was selected by 31% of the participants as the most important item for supporting student academic achievement. Table 2 is a summary of the descriptive statistics for the perceived importance of the items related to Academic Standards and Personal/Social Standard in supporting student academic achievement.

### **Implementation of Standards in Supporting Student Academic Achievement**

Results suggest that elementary school counselors implement personal/social items at a slightly higher level in their school counseling programs compared to academic items. Means of the implementation ratings for Academic Standard ranged from 2.87 to 3.57 ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ); means for Personal/Social Standard ranged from 2.75 to 3.86 ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ). Although the  $t$ -test determined that the difference between the implementation means for Academic Standards and Personal/Social Standard was statistically significant ( $p = .0001$ ), it was not a dramatic difference. A Pearson product moment correlation revealed a moderately strong relationship ( $r = .76$ ) between the implementation of Academic Standards and Personal/Social Standards.

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Importance and Implementation Level of Standards*

	Importance		Rated Most Important	Implementation	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b><i>Academic Development Standard</i></b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>.37</b>	--	<b>3.26</b>	<b>.46</b>
Understand the importance of individual effort, hard work, and persistence.	<b>3.79</b>	<b>.43</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>.57</b>
Understand the relationship of academic achievement to current and future success in school.	3.59	.58	6.8%	3.29	.69
Recognize personal strengths and weaknesses related to learning.	3.57	.57	6.8%	3.24	.71
Demonstrate individual initiative and a positive interest in learning.	3.34	.66	6.3%	2.95	.75
Understand the expectations of the educational environment.	<b>3.82</b>	<b>.42</b>	4.4%	<b>3.55</b>	<b>.63</b>
Apply study skills necessary for academic achievement.	3.64	.56	3.9%	3.34	.73
Use study skills and test-taking strategies.	3.58	.62	3.9%	3.37	.73
Use critical thinking skills and test taking strategies.	3.53	.58	1.9%	3.24	.77
Demonstrate time management and organizational skills.	3.53	.59	1.9%	3.19	.72
Use appropriate communication skills to ask for help when needed.	3.57	.60	0.5%	3.40	.68
Understand that mistakes are part of the learning process.	3.50	.60	0.5%	3.28	.72
Work cooperatively in small and large groups towards a common goal.	3.45	.65	0	3.30	.68
Work independently to achieve academic success.	3.30	.69	0	2.97	.77
Understand the choices, options, and requirements of the middle school environment.	3.20	.76	0	2.87	.94
<b><i>Personal/Social Development Standard</i></b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>.39</b>	--	<b>3.36</b>	<b>.39</b>
Exhibit the principles of character, including honesty, trustworthiness, respect for the rights and properties of others, respect for rules and laws, taking responsibility for one's own actions, fairness, caring, and citizenship.	<b>3.92</b>	<b>.29</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>.42</b>
Understand decision making and problem solving strategies.	<b>3.75</b>	.49	6.3%	3.55	.59
Demonstrate self-discipline and self-reliance.	3.57	.57	3.9%	3.31	.70
Identify resource people in the school and community and understand how to seek their help.	3.31	.70	1.4%	3.18	.76
Use strategies for handling conflict in a peaceful way.	<b>3.76</b>	.48	1.0%	<b>3.73</b>	<b>.48</b>
Understand how to make and keep friends and work cooperatively with others.	<b>3.78</b>	.48	0.5%	<b>3.77</b>	<b>.43</b>
Demonstrate good manners and respectful behavior towards others.	3.71	.49	0	<b>3.74</b>	<b>.47</b>
Use strategies for managing peer pressure.	3.56	.59	0	3.37	.71
Understand that Americans are one people of many diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and national origins who are united as Americans by common customs and traditions.	3.29	.72	0	3.02	.82
Understand change as a part of growth.	3.26	.70	0	3.06	.72
Understand the importance of short- and long-term goals.	3.24	.69	0	3.02	.72
Identify the emotional and physical dangers of substance use and abuse.	3.27	.78	0	2.75	.95

Items rated highest for implementation included (a) *exhibit the principles of character* (personal/social;  $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ); (b) *understand how to make and keep friends and work cooperatively with others* (personal/social;  $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ); (c) *demonstrate good manners and respectful behavior towards others* (personal/social;  $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ); (d) *use strategies for handling conflict in a peaceful way* (personal/social;  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ); (e) *understand the importance of individual effort, hard work, and persistence* (academic;  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ); and (f) *understand the expectations of the educational environment* (academic;  $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 6.3$ ). Table 2 is a summary of the descriptive statistics for levels of implementation for all 26 items.

### **Relationship Among Motivation, Importance, and Implementation**

Participants rated each of the 16 items on the SIMS from 1 (*corresponds not at all*) to 7 (*corresponds exactly*) as "why you choose to incorporate personal/social development interventions into your school counseling programs as a strategy for supporting academic achievement." Means and standard deviations of the situational motivation subscales in choosing personal/social items to support student academic achievement were *identified regulation* ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), *intrinsic motivation* ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ), *external regulation* ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), and *amotivation* ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ).

Correlations across all eight subscales ranged from  $-.009$  to  $.76$  (see Table 1). There was a moderately high correlation within the importance ( $r = .74$ ) ratings and within implementation ( $r = .76$ ) ratings. However, the correlation between importance and implementation dropped slightly ( $r = .67$  for Academic Standard;  $r = .63$  for Personal/Social Standard). *Intrinsic motivation* and *identified regulation* were

moderately related ( $r = .63$ ), while the remaining motivation subscale scores were low to negligibly related to each other.

Three of the situational motivation subscales were not related either to perceptions of importance or to levels of implementation for the Personal/Social Standard; *identified regulation* was only very weakly related to perceptions of importance ( $r = .27$ ) and implementation ( $r = .18$ ) of Personal/Social Standard. In contrast to expectation, the hypothesis that *intrinsic motivation* would be the most salient type of motivation for implementing Personal/Social Standards as a strategy for supporting student academic achievement was not confirmed. Not only was this not the most salient type of motivation, its relationship to perceived importance of the Personal/Social Standard was low and not statistically significant ( $r = .14$ ), and it had no relationship to implementation of this type of Standard ( $r = .01$ ).

Two simple multiple regressions were performed so that the proportion of the variance in perceived importance and implementation level of the Personal/Social Standard that could be attributed to all four situational motivation dimensions could be determined. The motivation variables explained a statistically significant but small 6.3% of the variance in perceived importance [ $F(4, 176) = 2.88, p = .024$ ]. The *identified regulation* subscale was the only predictor variable that obtained a statistically significant beta coefficient (beta = .24,  $p < .05$ ). The explanatory power of the four situational motivation dimensions for levels of implementation of the Personal/Social Standard was even lower. The motivation variables accounted for a non-statistically significant 4% of the variance in level of implementation. The *identified regulation*

subscale was the only predictor variable that obtained a statistically significant beta coefficient (beta = .25,  $p < .05$ ).

Two additional simple multiple regression models were computed to determine the proportion of the variance in perceived importance and in the level of implementation of the Academic Standard that could be explained by the four situational motivation scales together. The correlations between the situational motivation scores and the ratings on the importance and implementation of the Academic Standard were very low. The situational motivation subscales accounted for a non-statistically significant 2.3% of the variance in perceived importance [ $F(4, 170) = 0.99, p = .41$ ]. None of the beta coefficients for the predictor variables reached statistical significance. The final multiple regression model revealed that the four situational motivation subscales explained a marginally higher but non-statistically significant 4.3% of the variance in level of implementation of the Academic Standard [ $F(4, 165) = 1.82, p = .128$ ]. The *identified regulation* subscale obtained a statistically significant beta coefficient (beta = .27,  $p = .009$ ).

Overall, the four situational motivation subscales made very small contributions to the variance in participants' perceived importance and levels of implementation for Academic and Personal/Social Standards. In fact, only one regression model reached statistical significance with the predictor variables accounting for only a marginal 6.3% of the variance in perceived importance of the Personal/Social Standard.

### **Perceived Importance Explained by Identified Regulation**

Following the conclusion of the study, several results suggested that the explanatory power of the *identified regulation* subscale should be further examined.

First, two items contributing to the *identified regulation* subscale possessed the highest means: *because I feel these interventions are important for my program* ( $M = 6.31$ ) and *because I think that these interventions are good for my program* ( $M = 5.33$ ). Second, the *identified regulation* subscale obtained the only statistically significant beta coefficient in three of the four regression models. Third, the correlations between the *identified regulation* subscale and the importance and implementation subscales were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . Therefore, a "modified" *identified regulation* subscale consisting of only these two items was used in two additional simple multiple regression models to determine the proportion of the variance in perceived importance of the two types of Standards that could be explained by the *modified identified regulation* subscale and the other three motivation subscales (*intrinsic motivation, external regulation, amotivation*).

A statistically significant but small 7% of the variance in perceived importance of the Personal/Social Standard [ $F(4, 178) = 3.29, p = .012$ ] was explained (see Table 3). This was a slight increase from the 6.3% when the four-item *identified regulation* subscale was used. The *modified identified regulation* subscale was the only predictor variable that obtained a statistically significant beta coefficient (beta = .23,  $p = .005$ ). Finally, the three situational motivation subscales with the two-item *modified identified regulation* subscale accounted for a non-statistically significant 3% of the variance in perceived importance of the Academic Standard [ $F(4, 172) = 1.37, p = .25$ ]. Although statistical significance was not achieved, this was also a slight increase from 2.3% to 3.2%. The beta coefficient for the *modified identified regulation* subscale reached statistical significance (beta = .18,  $p = .03$ ).

**Table 3**

*Regression of Situational Motivation Subscales on Perceived Importance of Standards*

Model 1 Summary (*Perceived Importance of Personal/Social Standards*)

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>R Squared</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Beta Coefficient</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Whole Model	.070	3.29		<b>.012</b>
<i>Intrinsic Motivation</i>			.065	.440
<i>Modified Identified Regulation</i>			.228	<b>.005*</b>
<i>External Regulation</i>			.001	.987
<i>Amotivation</i>			-.030	.711

\*Significant .05 level (2 tailed)

Model 2 Summary (*Perceived Importance of Academic Standards*)

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>R Squared</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Beta Coefficient</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Whole Model	.032	1.37		.246
<i>Intrinsic Motivation</i>			-.028	.746
<i>Modified Identified Regulation</i>			.183	<b>.033*</b>
<i>External Regulation</i>			-.043	.627
<i>Amotivation</i>			-.013	.878

\*Significant .05 level (2 tailed)

Although the two-item *modified identified regulation* scores were strongly related to the four-item scores ( $r = .79$ ), there did seem to be a very slight improvement in the regressions when all four motivation scores were used to predict perceived importance of the Standards. Considered alone, the two-item *modified identified regulation* measure explained 4% of the variance in the importance of the Academic Standard and 7% of the variance in the importance of the Personal/Social Standard for supporting student academic achievement.

## Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that elementary school counselors perceive no difference in the importance between the Academic Standard and the Personal/Social Standard as a strategy for supporting student academic achievement. Additionally, these elementary school counselors not only perceived both types of development to be important, they also put these beliefs into actual practice. For these elementary school counselors, the best approach to program delivery is to implement both academic and personal/social development interventions. This study provides empirical support for the comprehensiveness of topics currently addressed by elementary school counseling programs including character education, social skills, manners, conflict resolution, academic motivation, and school rules. These conclusions are similar to research on school counselors' work activities suggesting they value and regularly implement comprehensive programs and interventions (Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005).

Several findings highlight a trend towards participants' recognition of the value of personal/social development in supporting academic achievement. First, participants' ratings indicate that the Personal/Social Standard was implemented at slightly higher level than the Academic Standard, and there was a moderately high correlation for the implementation ratings between the two types of Standards. Additionally, although academic items were chosen more often than personal/social items as most important, the largest percent of participants (31%) felt the personal/social item to "*exhibit the principles of character....*" was the most important for supporting academic achievement.

Finally, results show that elementary school counselors are somewhat more likely to determine the importance and implementation of particular Standards by asking themselves which are most important to their programs. The small, but statistically significant relationship between *identified regulation* and a comprehensive program supports the grounded theory of Brott and Myers (1999) that these school counselors are choosing behaviors congruent with their identity and values in a process of professional identity development.

The situational motivation of these participants is in contrast to SDT literature that describes a distinct continuum of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Ryan & Deci, 2006). One possible explanation is the way in which items from the SIMS were adapted from a singular, generic activity to a specific school counseling focus (i.e., supporting student academic achievement). It is possible these adjustments caused participants to consolidate all personal/social development interventions into a single construct and, therefore, hindered the ability of the measure to adequately capture unique aspects of situational motivation for particular work activities.

However, perhaps a more likely explanation is that the type of motivation hypothesized to be the most salient for participants' levels of implementation of Standards was inaccurate. By definition, behaviors that are intrinsically motivated are not dominated by physiological drives and for which the reward is spontaneous satisfaction of the activity itself (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). In the current study, participants were asked to identify their type of motivation for adopting a particular program focus *for the purposes of supporting academic achievement*. The presence of

a strong external reward, such as improving academic achievement, may have restricted participants' motivation from being classified as *intrinsic motivation*. That is, although counselors may implement personal/social development interventions because they personally believe these activities are valuable for students, they may not necessarily conduct them independent of their work responsibilities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this research is the low participation of elementary school counselors on which to generalize the results. Although the response rate was reasonable (39%,  $n = 212$ ), it is important to note that at the time of data collection there were a total of 1,302 full-time elementary school counselors employed in Virginia public schools (B. Mason, personal communication, October 23, 2008). Despite several attempts to persuade school counseling supervisors to forward the study information to all elementary counselors in their school district, 84% of elementary school counselors either did not receive the email or chose not to participate.

Demographic data revealed the presence of characteristics that could affect the generalizability of the results. The majority of participants reported adopting national, state, and local school counseling program Standards. Research has shown that Standards-based school counseling programs not only serve to clarify the role of the school counselor but also to outline a more comprehensive program focus (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Dahir, 2001). Furthermore, 77% of school counselors reported they were *not* required to facilitate their classroom guidance lessons through block scheduling. Counselors are considered "in the block" if classroom guidance lessons are incorporated into the school's master schedule, reducing the amount of time counselors

can devote to other areas of their program. Moreover, 63% of participants reported they were *not* in charge of coordinating the standardized testing program in their schools. Studies on the effects of testing responsibilities on school counselors suggest such tasks can severely restrict the counselor's time to fully implement a school counseling program that addresses academic and personal/social development needs of students (Brown, Galassi, & Akos, 2004). While it is encouraging that the majority of this study's participants use Standards to guide their programs and are not assigned to time intensive responsibilities, the findings may not represent school counselors who work within the confines of different environments and expectations.

Another limitation of the study is that all items were based on self-report. The inherent subjectivity and high ego-involvement when participants rate each item could be affected by social desirability (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). Additionally, the items used in this study were taken directly from the *Standards for School Counseling Programs in Virginia Public Schools* (VDOE, 2004). How counselors interpret, apply, and share the results of interventions addressing Academic and Personal/Social Standards may differ among the school counselors. Therefore, a limitation of this study is the lack of evidence as to how the Standards are being addressed.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Participants' high importance and implementation ratings for both types of Standards provide empirical support that elementary school counselors recognize that comprehensive programs are best practice when it comes to supporting student academic achievement. Therefore, counselors need to strengthen their advocacy skills to persuade others of the valuable connection between personal/social development

and academic achievement. One practical way is to engage in active collaboration with principals, teachers, and parents. In fact, research on school counselor collaboration efforts suggests a team approach to increasing academic achievement ensures that programs and services are tailored and systematically delivered to meet the individual needs of all students (Baker, Robichaud, Westforth Dietrich, Wells, & Schreck, 2009; Bemak, 2000; Sink & Stroh, 2003). Likewise, counselors should be empowered to take a leadership role in school and community discussions to ensure that the benefits of a comprehensive school counseling program are realized. Presentations at staff, PTA, and school board meetings to highlight responsive services being delivered and to report effectiveness through accountability will keep all stakeholders informed of the school counselor's contributions to student academic achievement.

Furthermore, it is important for school counselors to collect data to determine the impact of academic and personal/social development interventions on academic achievement (Carey & Dimmitt, 2008; Dahir & Stone, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Lapan, 2001; Paisley & Hayes, 2003). User-friendly accountability tools (e.g., Brott, 2006; Kaffenberger & Young, 2007) can simplify and organize results data so it can be easily shared with stakeholders. School counselors can then initiate a dialogue to advocate for the necessity of maintaining a comprehensive school counseling program.

Finally, several results suggest that participants perceive personal/social development as having an important role in supporting student achievement. Continuing professional development is critical for ensuring that school counselors are well informed about current research and innovative practices that link personal/social development (e.g., emotional intelligence, social competence, academic enablers) to

academic achievement. In particular, participating regularly in workshops, trainings, and conferences that teach school counselors how to use data to advocate for personal/social development interventions may protect these services from being reduced or eliminated.

The results of this study provide support for further investigations in several areas. First, the importance and implementation of both Academic and Personal/Social Standards in a comprehensive elementary school counseling program was demonstrated. Dahir, Burnham, and Stone (2009) examined school counselors' perceptions of the program components outlined in *The ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2005) and found that middle school counselors obtained the highest mean scores on the personal/social development subscale, suggesting a higher involvement with social and emotional concerns than their elementary counterparts. Future research could focus within a school district and across elementary, middle, and high school levels. Perceptions could be gathered from school counselors, parents, teachers, and administrators for a comparison of the importance and implementation of personal/social development supporting student academic achievement.

Future research could illuminate how school counselors select activities and interventions that support student academic achievement beyond self-report measures. Qualitative research may be an avenue for giving a voice to and providing a better understanding of the contributions school counseling programs make to student academic success.

Finally, it was proposed that the type of situational motivation internalized by participants explains a proportion of the differences in participants' levels of

implementation for the Personal/Social Standard. Specifically, it was hypothesized that elementary school counselors would be *intrinsically* motivated; the results did not support this hypothesis. However, several findings indicate that further exploration of *identified regulation* may offer additional insight into elementary school counselors' situational motivation. More research is needed to investigate situational motivation either through other instruments or through alternate models.

### **Conclusion**

This exploratory survey study was one step for determining elementary school counselors' perceptions about supporting student academic achievement through state Standards for school counseling programs with a particular focus on personal and social development. Not only do elementary school counselors perceive these Standards to be important, they are implemented with a high degree of frequency. It is evident that school counselors embrace a comprehensive program focus as a valuable method for supporting student achievement.

Finally, the situational motivation of elementary school counselors was explored to shed light on how counselors make program decisions and persevere with the current emphasis on academic achievement. It was found that elementary school counselors exhibit *identified regulation* as part of an internalization process in their professional identity development. Decisions and perseverance are less about what is important to them personally and more about what is important to their program.

Further research is needed to both define the contributions from school counseling programs in support of student academic achievement and to better understand the situational motivation of professional school counselors. Continuing

research in these areas will help school counselors to be critical team members in the schools providing comprehensive school counseling programs so that every student can experience academic success.

## References

- American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Baker, S. B., Robichaud, T. A., Westforth Dietrich, V. C., Wells, S.C., & Schreck, R.E. (2009). School counselor consultation: A pathway to advocacy, collaboration, and leadership. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 200-206. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-12.200
- Barriga, A. Q., Doran, J. W., Newell, S. B., Morrison, E. M., Barbetti, V., & Robbins, B. D. (2002). Relationships between problem behaviors and academic achievement in adolescents: The unique role of attention problems. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 10*, 233-240. doi:10.1177/10634266020100040501
- Bemak, F. (2000). Transforming the role of the counselor to provide leadership in educational reform through collaboration. *Professional School Counseling, 3*, 323-331. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Brott, P. E. (2006). Counselor education accountability: Training the effective professional school counselor. *Professional School Counseling, 10*, 179-187. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Brott, P. E., & Myers, J. E. (1999). Development of professional school counselor identity: A grounded theory. *Professional School Counseling, 2*, 339-348. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>

- Brown, D., Galassi, J. P., & Akos, P. (2004). School counselors' perceptions of the impact of high-stakes testing. *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 31-39. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Campbell, C., & Dahir, C. (1997). *Sharing the vision: The national standards for school counseling programs*. Alexandria, VA: American School Counseling Association.
- Carey, J., & Dimmitt, C. (2008). A model for evidence-based elementary school counseling: Using school data, research, and evaluation to enhance practice. *The Elementary School Journal, 108*, 422-430. doi:10.1086/589471
- Dahir, C. A. (2001). The national standards for school counseling programs: Development and implementation. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 320-327. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Dahir, C. A., Burnham, J. J., & Stone, C. (2009). Listen to the voices: School counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling 12*, 182-192. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-12.182
- Dahir, C. A., & Stone, C. B. (2003). Accountability: A M.E.A.S.U.R.E. of the impact school counselors have on student achievement. *Professional School Counseling, 6*, 214-221. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1980). Self-determination theory: When mind mediates behavior. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 1*, 33-43. Retrieved from <http://www.umaine.edu/jmb/>

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., & Vansteenkiste, M. V. (2004). Self-determination theory and basic need satisfaction: Understanding human development in positive psychology. *Ricerche di Psicologia, 27*, 23-40. Retrieved from <http://www.francoangeli.it/riviste/sommario.asp?IDRivista=41>
- DiPerna, J. C., & Elliott, S. N. (2002). Promoting academic enablers to improve student achievement: An introduction to the mini-series. *School Psychology Review, 31*, 293-297. Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/spr/sprmain.aspx>
- DiPerna, J. C., Volpe, R. J., & Elliott, S. N. (2001). A model of academic enablers and elementary reading/language arts achievement. *School Psychology Review, 31*, 298-312. Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/spr/sprmain.aspx>
- Fleming, C. B., Haggerty, K. P., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., Mazza, J. J., & Gruman, D. H. (2005). Do social and behavioral characteristics targeted by preventive interventions predict standardized test scores and grades? *Journal of School Health, 75*, 342-349. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2005.tb06694.x
- Foster, L. H., Young, J. S., & Hermann, M. (2005). The work activities of professional school counselors: Are the National Standards being addressed? *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 313-321. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>

- Guay, F., Vallerand, R. J., & Blanchard, C. (2000). On the assessment of situational intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: The Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS). *Motivation and Emotion, 24*, 175-213. doi:10.1023/A:1005614228250
- Johnson, J., & Johnson, C. D. (2003). Results-based guidance: A systems approach to student support programs. *Professional School Counseling, 6*, 180-184.  
Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Kaffenberger, C., & Young, A. (2007). *Making data work*. Alexandria, VA: American School Counselor Association.
- Lapan, R. T. (2001). Results-based comprehensive guidance and counseling programs: A framework for planning and evaluation. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 289-299. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Lieberman, A. (2004). Confusion regarding school counselor functions: School leadership impacts role clarity. *Education, 124*, 552-558. Retrieved from <http://www.projectinnovation.biz/index.html>
- Paisley, P. O., & Hayes, R. L. (2003). School counseling in the academic domain: Transformations in preparation and practice. *Professional School Counseling, 6*, 198-204. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Parker, J. D.A., Creque, R. E., Barnhart, D. L., Harris, J. I., Majeski, S. A., Wood, L. M., & Hogan, M.J. (2004). Academic achievement in high school: Does emotional

intelligence matter? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37, 1321-1330.  
doi:10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.002

Paulhus, D., & Reid, D. (1991). Enhancement and denial in socially desirable responding. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(2) 307-317.  
doi:10.1037//0022-3514.60.2.307

Petrides, K. V., Frederickson, N., & Furnham, A. (2004). The role of trait emotional intelligence in academic performance and deviant behavior in school. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 36, 277-293. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(03)00084-9

Prusak, K. A., Treasure, D. C., Darst, P. W., & Pangrazi, R. P. (2004). The effects of choice on the motivation of adolescent girls in physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 23, 19-29. Retrieved from <http://journals.humankinetics.com/jtpe>

Ratelle, C. F., Baldwin, M. W., & Vallerand, R. J. (2004). On the cued activation of situational motivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 41, 482-487. Retrieved from [http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws\\_home/622874/description#description](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/622874/description#description)

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67. doi:10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.68

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality, 74*, 1557-1585. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00420.x
- SAS Institute. (2007). JMP (Version 7) [Statistical software]. Cary, NC.
- Saudino, K. J., & Plomin, R. (2007). Why are hyperactivity and academic achievement related? *Child Development, 78*, 972-986. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01044.x
- Scheel, M. J., & Gonzalez, J. (2007). An investigation of a model of academic motivation for school counseling. *Professional School Counseling, 11*, 49-64. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-11.49
- Sink, C. A., & Stroh, H. R. (2003). Raising achievement test scores of early elementary school students through comprehensive school counseling programs, *Professional School Counseling 6*, 350-364. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Standage, M., Treasure, D. C., Duda, J. L., & Prusak, K. A. (2003). Validity, reliability and invariance of the situational motivation scale (SIMS) across diverse physical activity contexts. *Journal of Sports and Exercise Psychology, 25*, 19-43. Retrieved from <http://journals.humankinetics.com/jsep>
- Stevens, R., & Pihl, R. O. (1987). Seventh grade students at-risk for school failure. *Adolescence, 22*, 333-345. Retrieved from [https://my.apa.org/apa/idm/login.seam?ERIGHTS\\_TARGET=http%3A%2F%2Fpsycnet.apa.org%2F%3F&cid=32638747](https://my.apa.org/apa/idm/login.seam?ERIGHTS_TARGET=http%3A%2F%2Fpsycnet.apa.org%2F%3F&cid=32638747)
- U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *The No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: Author.

- Vallerand, R. J. (1997). Toward a hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In M. P. Zanna (Ed). *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 271-361). New York: Academic Press. doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60019-2
- Virginia Department of Education. (2004). *Standards for school counseling programs* (Rev. ed.). Richmond, VA: Author.
- Webb, L. D., Brigman, G. A., & Campbell, C. (2005). Linking school counselors and student success: A replication of the Student Success Skills approach targeting the academic and social competence of students. *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 407-413. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>
- Williams, S., & McGee, R. (1994). Reading attainment and juvenile delinquency. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 35*, 441-459. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01733.x
- Zalaquett, C. P. (2005). Principals' perceptions of elementary school counselors' roles and functions. *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 451-457. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235>

### **Biographical Statements**

Jennifer S. Barna, Ph.D., NCC is an assistant professor and the School Counseling Program Coordinator at Marywood University, Scranton PA. Research interests include school counseling programs and academic achievement, accountability and advocacy, and personal-social development interventions.

Pamelia E. Brott, Ph.D., NCC is an associate professor in the counselor education program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Northern Virginia Center, Falls Church, VA. Research interests include professional identity development, accountability in school counseling, and constructivist approach to career counseling.